Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Pinedale Region

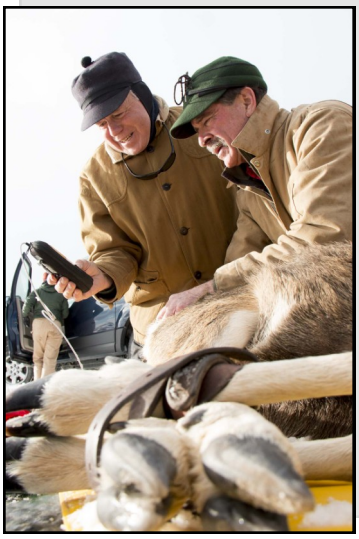
December 2016 Newsletter

Wildlife capture crew members prepare to ferry deer to the handling station.

Wyoming Range Deer Project

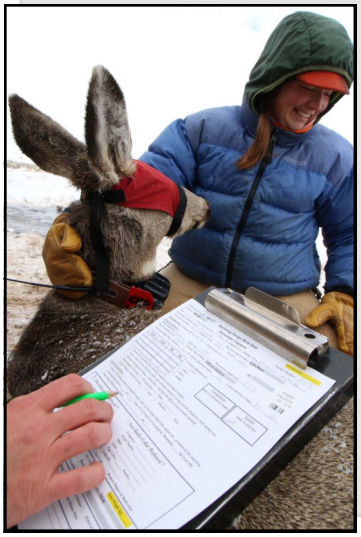
The Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit and Wyoming Game and Fish Department, along with many other volunteers, conducted another mule deer capture in the LaBarge area. The research was initiated during the winter of 2012-2013. The overarching goal of the project is to investigate the nutritional relationships between mule deer populations, energy development, habitat conditions, and climate.

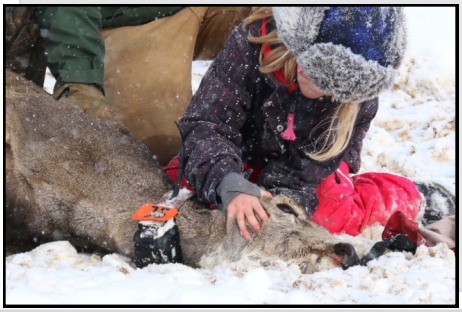
The first helicopter capture occurred in March 2013 with the capture of 70 adult females, 35 in the northern (Big Piney / La Barge) and 35 in the southern (Kemmerer / Evanston) winter ranges. Each deer has been fitted with a GPS collar to be worn for two years. Ultrasonography is also performed at each capture to determine percent body fat and pregnancy. Animals are recaptured each December and March to evaluate change in body condition between seasons.

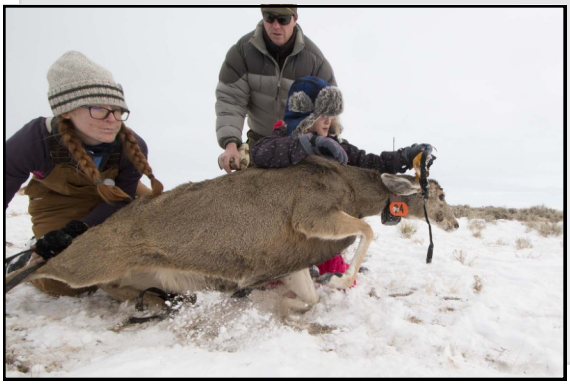


Game and Fish Biologist Gary Fralick and Former U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Director John Turner get a temperature reading on a captured doe.

Additionally, the deer are monitored each autumn to determine fawn production and survival. Productivity of individual animals combined with their body condition and forage production data will be used to determine the habitat's "nutritional carrying capacity." Ultimately, this information will allow wildlife managers to assess whether the Wyoming Range deer herd is reaching its reproductive capacity based on current available habitat. This research addresses primary components outlined in the WY Range Mule Deer Initiative.







(Left) University of Wyoming Graduate Student Samantha Dwinnell shares a chuckle with her peers while handling a captured deer. (Above right) Julia Hymas, 11, of Big Piney shares a moment with a doe mule deer before releasing it (Right) back to it's winter range near LaBarge.

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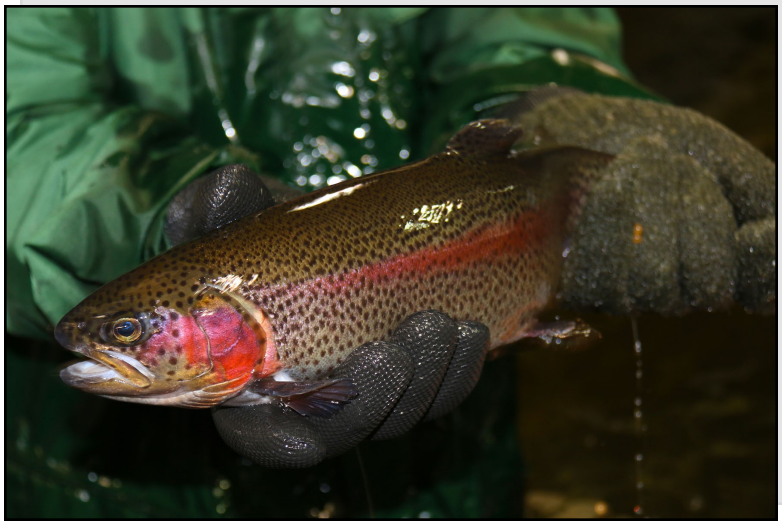
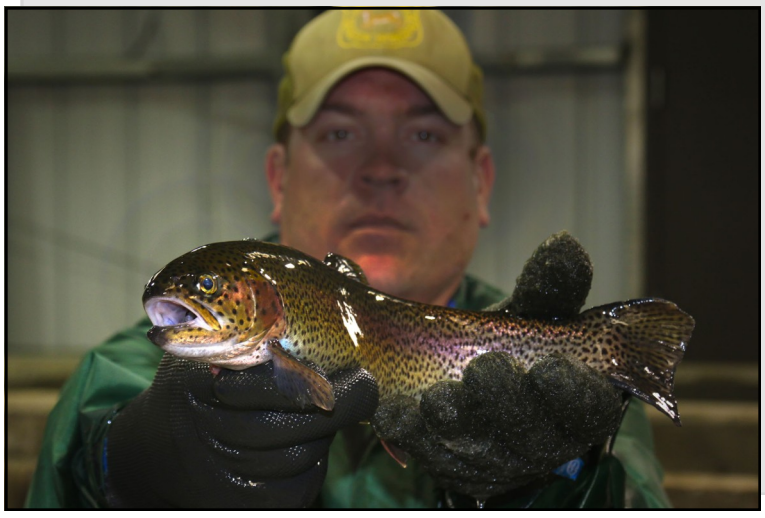
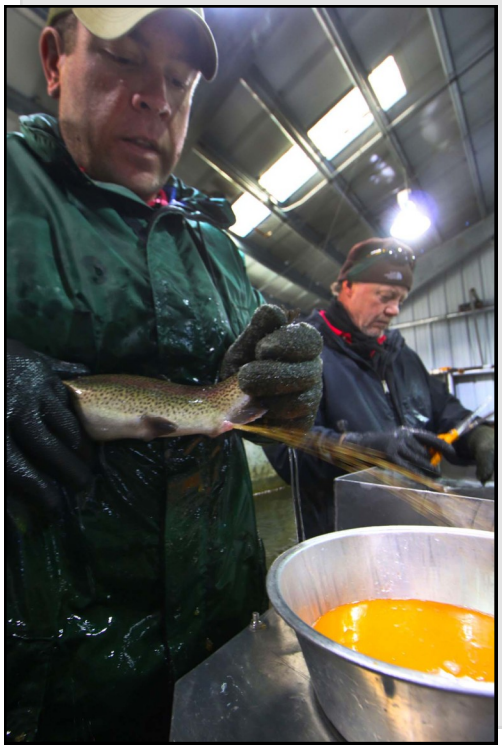


Boulder Fall Rainbows

The Boulder Hatchery finished up the annual spawning of their fall rainbow trout. The crew spent nine weeks collecting 3.1 million eggs to be hatched, reared and stocked back to Wyoming waters. Rainbow trout typically spawn in the spring, but this strain has been developed over the years to spawn in the fall. This allows the hatcheries to have an array of different sized fish available for stocking when needed.

(Top left) Buolder Superintendent Chip Moller gathers up another batch of fish to spawn. (Bottom and right) Fish Culturist Matt Joki holds a fish in its spawning colors and also collects eggs from a ripe female rainbow trout.





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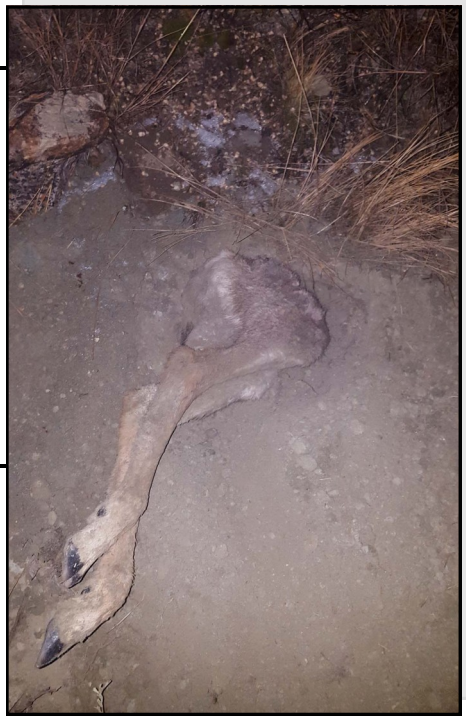
Fawn's Fate

Big Piney Game Warden Adam Hymas been assisting in various aspects of the Wyoming Range Mule Deer Study since it's inception. One part of that study is to collar and monitor mule deer fawns to determine their survival and for those that die, what is killing them. This past month Hymas was called out to try and find one of those fawns whose collar was sending a mortality signal. The dead fawn proved hard to find, but eventually it was found completely down a badger hole and buried!



Elk on the Move

North Pinedale Game Warden Bubba Haley has been busy checking hunters and recording harvest of elk. Much of November was unseasonably warm with temperatures in the mid 60's. As a result, the elk that had dropped down in elevation and were accessible in October, moved back up into the mountains. Harvest opportunities diminished during the November cow elk hunts. The late season sagebrush hunts resulted in very few elk harvested.

Warden Haley responded to a call that several hundred elk had wandered onto the Alexander Ranch north of Pinedale in late November. Haley reports having moved approximately 400 elk back to the Black Butte feedground and continues to monitor the elk distribution in the vicinity. With the recent snow and colder weather, several area elk feedgrounds are now getting up and running.

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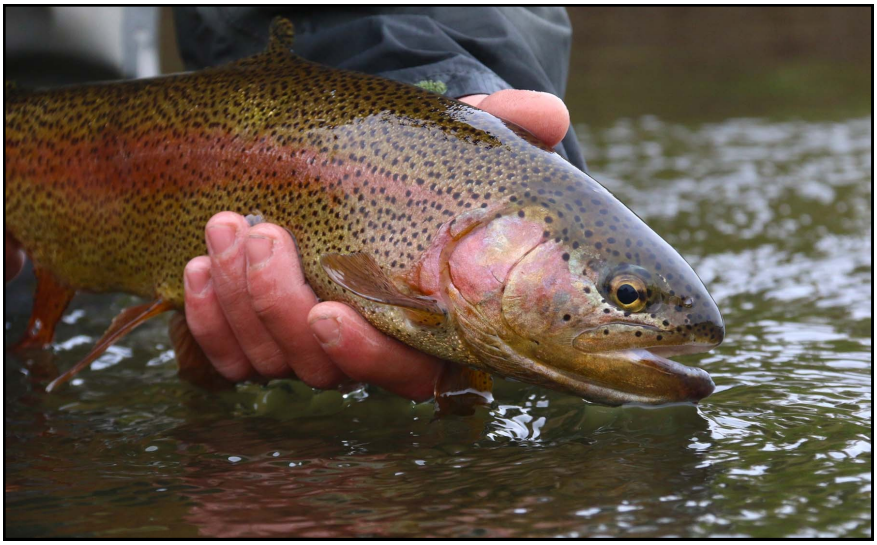
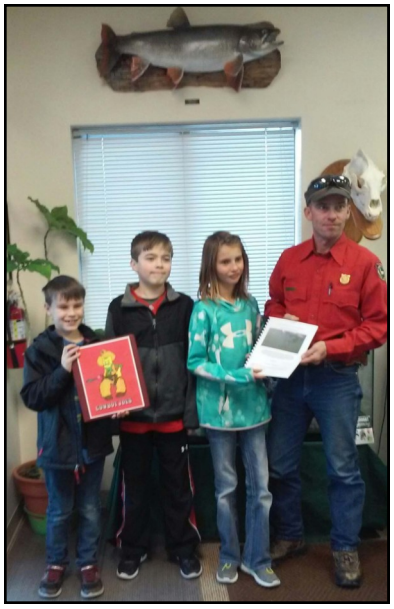
Saving the Fish



Pinedale Fish Biologists Pete Cavalli and Darren Rhea salvaged 42 rainbow trout that were stranded in an isolated pool in the Highland Ditch after flow was recently shut off for the winter. Additional fish were seen in the ditch near the headgate, but conditions in that area were not amenable for an attempt to capture them.



Along those lines, Pinedale Region Wildife Supervisor John Lund accepted a thank you from representatives of the "Cowboy Joes", Pinedale's first Lego League team. The team of local students constructed and demonstrated the effectiveness of a submersible robot designed to travel in irrigation ditches and move fish out of the ditches where they can become trapped.

From the Front Desk...

Pinedale Game and Fish Office Managers report that they have received numerous calls lately from individuals complaining about their neighbors feeding deer. With the number of animals congregating, people have expressed concern about their children's safety outdoors, wildlife-vehicle collisions and damage to ornamental trees and shrubs.

Big game animals, such as deer and moose will readily eat hay, but will typically continue to browse on woody plants because that's what their stomachs are naturally designed to consume. Wild ungulates have microorganisms in their stomachs to aid in digestion. These organisms are adapted to breakdown vegetation the animal naturally consumes during winter months, primarily woody plants. This means it takes a lot longer to digest hay, which is not normally available to them during the winter. That's why these animals can often starve to death despite having a stomach full of hay.

While there have been several attempts to make it illegal to feed wildlife at the state legislative level, all have failed. However, some Wyoming towns and counties have passed laws making it illegal.

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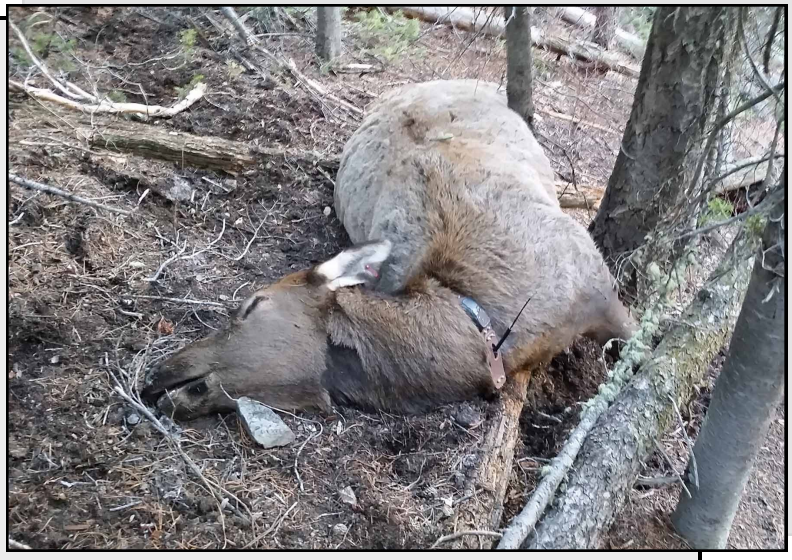
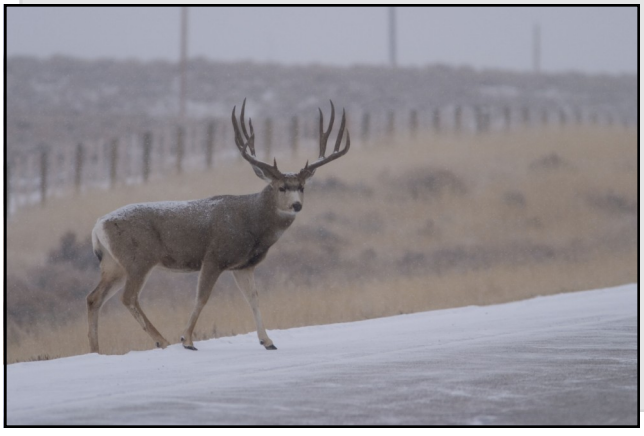
Elk (and data) Recovery



The Pinedale Brucellosis Habitat Feedground personnel hit the field to recover one of their collared cow elk that had died in the Greys River drainage south of Alpine. They had immobilized and collared the elk last winter at the Forest Park Feedground. The cow was found dead approximately ten miles south of the feedground. It was determined that the elk was a wounding loss and had likely been shot by a hunter the previous day. It is not uncommon for the crew to lose collared elk during the hunting season, but these new-technology satellite collars can now send an email to researchers if the animal/collar has not moved for an eight hour period, signifying a mortality. In the past, researchers would not know if an animal had died until they listened for it, usually the following spring, making it nearly impossible to determine the cause of death. Now they can be investigating an animal within hours of it's passing.



Deer on the Move

Wyoming is blessed with abundant big game populations and November and December is a time when many big game animals are headed for their traditional wintering areas at the lower elevations. This often puts animals in harms way, crossing roadways and such.

Regional game wardens have noted a marked increase in highway mortality recently, and natural deaths, as deer began migrating to their winter range. Hymas placed the dynamic highway signs in key areas to warn motorists about wildlife on the roads.